Christian Thoughts on the Movie and Tale of the 47 Ronin

My family rarely goes to the theater to see movies. Therefore it was only a few weeks ago that I finally got a chance to the 2013 movie 47 Ronin from Redbox.

While I have written a book on lessons for Christians from samurai warriors, this was my introduction to the national legend of the vengeance of the 47 samurai of Asano Naganori.

Despite the modern, Americanized treatment of the story, including witches, demons, and the insertion of an underdog with Anglo-Saxon blood, the gist of the story of the 47 samurai remains the same. When their lord is disgraced before the Imperial Shogun, and forced to commit ritual suicide, the 47 plan their revenge over the course of a year and execute it.

The story is centuries old; it is a little hard to expect not to have it spoiled for you. But as a fair warning, here be spoilers.

While the story of the 47 ronin is considered an great example of the samurai code, bushido, it has some merit for Christians as well, which can either serve as personal example, or as discussion points with your fellow Christians.

Death begets death. There is a saying that he who seeks revenge digs two graves. The ronin know this as they plot their revenge. They know that disobeying an order not to seek revenge, as well as assassination of another lord, is forbidden and they will face the death penalty for their action. Even in this noble (to their principles) example, the wage of sin is death, and the price for their sin must be paid, regardless of the noble intention.

Some Things are More Important Than Death. Understanding the fact that their was no chance of forgiveness for what they were about to do, the 47 ronin set out on their mission regardless. Honor for their former lord and the house they served was more important than their own lives. They were willing to sacrifice themselves to honor their lord.

Now, how many of us Christians are willing to avoid sin, in which we dishonor God, even to the point of death! Rather, we continually fall and have to amend our lives. Seldom is death on the line – we sacrifice our principles for reputation, work, money, pleasure or some other trivial thing. These samurai traded their lives for honor, and for a fallen human lord. Why do we not sacrifice lesser things for our perfect Lord?

Their is Shame in Being Leaderless. As Americans, we pride ourselves on independence. But as Christians we are called to dependence on God. The samurai understood that there was not shame in dependence, and in this way bushido can illustrate some concepts that are foreign to us. In fact, in the introduction to the 2013 movie it states that while samurai were very highly regarded, to be ronin, or masterless, was to be lower than all other classes. I'm not certain as to the veracity of the statement, but being ronin was a thing greatly feared by a samurai. I have just the smallest hunch this will be a big part of the upcoming film *Masterless*.

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Paul Nowak is a husband and father of 7, who also happens to be a writer and author. He has written *The Way of the Christian Samurai* among other books.

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